



OXFORD PAMPHLETS ON WORLD AFFAIRS  
No. 14

---

THE TREATY OF  
BREST-LITOVSK  
AND GERMANY'S  
EASTERN POLICY

BY

JOHN W. WHEELER-BENNETT

NEW EDITION

*Revised and enlarged*

OXFORD  
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

1940

EARLY in 1918 Germany and her allies, having defeated Russia and Rumania, concluded the Treaties of Brest-Litovsk and of Bucharest. These Treaties were annulled when the Central Powers were defeated by the Allies later in the year, but they are of great importance, firstly, as examples of Peace Treaties drawn up by a victorious Germany (in which connexion it is instructive to compare them with the Treaty of Versailles<sup>1</sup>); secondly, because of their repercussions on the problems of to-day, for after a lapse of twenty years Germany and Russia have met again at Brest-Litovsk—under vastly different circumstances.

The first edition of this Pamphlet was written before the outbreak of war, and published in September, before the Russian invasion of Poland. It has now been revised and enlarged. For the new matter the author has drawn largely upon his article in *Foreign Affairs*, Jan. 1940, to which grateful acknowledgements are due.

Mr. Wheeler-Bennett is the author of *Brest-Litovsk: The Forgotten Peace* (Macmillan, 21s. net), the standard work on the subject.

<sup>1</sup> See Oxford Pamphlet No. 6, *The Fourteen Points and the Treaty of Versailles*, by G. M. Gathorne-Hardy.

First published Sept. 1939

Second Edition Dec. 1939

New and Enlarged Edition Feb. 1940

Printed in Great Britain and published by

THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS Amen House, E.C.4

LONDON EDINBURGH GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO

MELBOURNE, CAPE TOWN BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS

HUMPHREY MILFORD Publisher to the University

# THE TREATY OF BREST-LITOVSK AND GERMANY'S EASTERN POLICY

## **The Forgotten Peace**

**L**ITTLE more than twenty-one years ago—on 3 March 1918—the first treaty of peace between belligerent parties in the World War was signed by the Central Powers and Russia at Brest-Litovsk. Few then appreciated the full significance of the event. At the moment it appeared to mark the complete victory of German arms on the Eastern Front, and, for Russia, the greatest humiliation in her diplomatic and military history. But though these results were of grave importance in themselves, the more far-reaching effects of the treaty could not be guessed at. In retrospect, however, it is possible to say that, with the exception of the Treaty of Versailles, the Peace Treaties of Brest-Litovsk with Russia and the Ukraine and the complementary Treaty of Bucharest with Rumania had consequences and results more important than any other peace settlement since the Congress of Vienna.

## **The Conference at Brest-Litovsk**

The long-expected Revolution had broken out in Russia in March 1917 with the slogan of 'Peace, Bread, and Land', and the German High Command had added its contribution to chaos by allowing Lenin and his followers to return from Switzerland to Petrograd in the famous 'sealed train'. As a result,

the political complexion of the Revolution changed rapidly from 'parlour pink' to scarlet; the Liberal government of Prince Lvov gave place to the Socialist régime of Alexander Kerensky; and he in turn was ousted by the Bolsheviks at the Second Revolution of November 1917.

The final Russian offensive of July 1917 had collapsed after the close of its early momentum, and the counter-thrust of the enemy had carried the German armies to Dvinsk and Riga. The Russian soldier, exhausted and war-weary, had 'voted for peace with his legs', in Lenin's phrase.

Capitalizing the deep-felt longing of the Russian masses for peace, Lenin at once declared a cessation of hostilities, and thus it came about that, after some vicissitudes and the murder of the Russian Chief of the General Staff, there sat down on 20 December at the Brest-Litovsk head-quarters of Prince Leopold of Bavaria one of the strangest gatherings in the history of modern diplomacy. Fate had decreed that the representatives of the most revolutionary régime ever known should sit at the same table with the representatives of the most reactionary military caste among the then ruling classes, that a Bavarian nobleman, a Knight of the Golden Fleece, and a Prussian major-general should negotiate on equal terms with a group of Bolshevik leaders but lately returned from exile, and from whose clothes the reek of dungeons had barely been banished.

The two groups were as widely separated in ideology as in social standing. The representatives

of the Central Powers spoke the ancient language of diplomacy. They thought in terms of strategic lines, of provinces ceded, of economic advantages to be gained. Not so the Bolsheviks. Their parlance was not one of frontiers and concessions; they were not concerned with geographical expressions. They aimed by propaganda upon war-weary European Socialism to achieve what they knew could not be achieved by arms, namely World Revolution and the replacement of military imperialism by the dictatorship of the proletariat. They were prepared to abandon whole provinces to the victors if by so doing they could arouse the working classes of the Central Powers to a realization of the evils of military dictatorship. He is no Socialist, wrote Lenin in his open letter to the American working men in 1918, who will not sacrifice his fatherland for the triumph of the social revolution.

### **German Aims**

So fundamental a difference in approach necessarily resulted in equally different techniques in negotiation. For both parties the time factor was vital. For Germany it was essential to concentrate all available troops on the Western Front as soon as possible in order to ensure the success of the spring offensive against the Allies on which the High Command had staked their all. Hindenburg and Ludendorff therefore demanded a speedy conclusion of the negotiations. Russia was at the mercy of Germany, they urged; no further resistance was

possible; and a victor's peace should crown a victor's war. Here at last was a chance to extend the frontiers of Germany to include the Russian provinces of Courland, Livonia, and Estonia, where both the aristocracy of the Baltic Barons and the middle class were largely of German origin, and also Lithuania. There opened before their eyes, too, the opportunity to exploit the rich black soil of the Ukraine, whence grain could be exported to feed the army and population of Germany, brought near starvation by the Allied blockade. A dream of reducing the former Russian Empire to a series of partitioned States, each dependent upon Germany as economic and political protectorates, began to take hold upon the imagination of the General Staff. But in any case speed was the essence of the contract. If the Bolsheviks would not immediately accept the terms offered by the Central Powers, then the offensive must be resumed and peace dictated at Petrograd instead of Brest-Litovsk.

The Imperial German Government, and in particular the Foreign Secretary, Baron Richard von Kühlmann, opposed this policy because of its crudeness and because, with greater political sagacity, they did not share the illusions of the General Staff. Even at that date Kühlmann doubted the possibility of a complete victory in the field for German arms. A negotiated peace was the best that could be hoped. Like the generals, he was anxious to obtain as great territorial gains as possible in the East, but only in order to hold them as bargaining factors when negotiations for a general peace finally became a possi-

bility. He hoped to avoid making territorial sacrifices in the West by displaying a readiness to surrender conquered territory in the East. Moreover, he was anxious to arrive at a settlement with the Russians peacefully in order to facilitate the course of future negotiations with the other Allied and Associated Powers. To this end the Central Powers accepted the formula of 'no annexations, no indemnities and the principle of self-determination' which the Bolsheviks put forward as the basis for negotiation of a general peace by all belligerent parties. When, however, it became evident that the remainder of the Entente Powers would not accept the invitation to Brest-Litovsk and that, as the Germans had always supposed, the Bolsheviks had to negotiate alone, the Central Powers flung off the mask of 'no annexations, &c.', and, under pressure from the German High Command, pursued a policy of unrelieved imperialism.

### **Russian Aims**

But, while the German generals demanded a speedy show-down, the Bolsheviks desired exactly the opposite. The longer the negotiations were drawn out the greater the opportunity for propaganda. If the workers and peasants in the countries both of the Entente and the Central Powers were to realize fully what had happened in Russia and were to conceive a desire for emulation, a certain interval was necessary during which the intentions and policy of the new Soviet State might become known. To the vast annoyance of the German General Staff,



the Bolsheviks were successful in imposing their policy of procrastination on the peace discussions. First Joffe and later Trotsky carried out delaying tactics with masterly skill, and for six weeks the conference was little more than a debating society. Trotsky discovered in Kühlmann an adversary who was his equal in dialectics, and the two indulged in what the irate Czernin later described as 'spiritual wrestling matches'. The German Secretary of State was trying to persuade his opponent to accept the fate of the occupied Baltic Provinces, as already settled. Trotsky maintained with a wealth of verbiage that their so-called 'self-expressed desire' for union with Germany was nothing but a veiled militarist annexation. As neither would abandon his viewpoint a complete deadlock ensued, and remained unbroken despite the protests of the representative of the Supreme Command, General Hoffmann, and the pleadings of the Austrian Foreign Minister, Count Czernin, who was aware that the sands of life for the Dual Monarchy were running out. The Supreme Command wanted troops and Austria-Hungary needed bread: as long as Kühlmann and Trotsky remained locked in rhetorical combat, neither was forthcoming.

### **The Conference breaks up**

10 February 1918 saw the end. On the previous day the Central Powers had signed a separate treaty of peace with the Ukraine, which had proclaimed its independence from Russia under a form of social democratic government. The agreement provided

for the exportation to Germany and Austria-Hungary of a million tons of foodstuffs and placed the newly created State under the virtual 'protection' of the Central Powers.

Outflanked from the south, and disappointed that the toiling masses in Europe had failed to respond to the glowing prospect of a proletarian paradise portrayed for them in an endless flood of propagandist word-pictures, the Russians were forced to abandon their policy of delay. The January strikes in Germany and Austria had momentarily encouraged Bolshevik hopes, but they had proved a false dawn. The Bolsheviks needed to be able to concentrate their full energies at home to consolidate the Revolution and to defend it against the counter-revolutionary forces of the Right and Centre, now organizing in the north, south, and east. New tactics were necessary. On 10 February, then, Trotsky made his historic gesture of 'No War—No Peace'. He refused to accept the German terms but declared the state of war at an end, and retired to Petrograd in belief that the Central Powers were so anxious for peace that they would accept the position despite its anomalies.

This gesture, dramatic and original though it was, had merely the effect of handing the game to the Supreme Command. Against the vehement protests of Kühlmann and Czernin and the weaker opposition of Chancellor von Hertling, Hindenburg and Ludendorff forced the Kaiser to agree to a resumption of hostilities. A rapid advance conducted by Hoffmann brought the German troops to within

raiding distance of Petrograd. The remnant of the Russian army, already undermined in discipline and morale by subversive propaganda, broke 'like thin clouds before a Biscay gale'. There was virtually no resistance. If the Revolution was to be saved, a 'breathing space' was essential. After a bitter internal struggle the Bolsheviki sued for peace. The German reply was an ultimatum setting forth conditions, for the discussion of which three days were allowed, while the treaty once signed must be ratified within two weeks.

### **The Peace of Brest-Litovsk**

With no other course open to them, the Bolsheviki accepted the inevitable, and on 3 March 1918 the Peace of Brest-Litovsk was signed. This treaty, together with the supplementary agreements of the following August, required Russia to renounce sovereignty in favour of Germany and Austria-Hungary over Russian Poland, Lithuania, Courland, Livonia, Estonia, and the Islands of the Moon Sound. To Turkey she had to cede Ardahan, Kars, and Batum. In addition she was forced to recognize the independence of Finland, the Ukraine, and Georgia, and to agree to reparation payments to the amount of 6,000,000,000 marks in goods, bonds, and gold, on which she actually paid instalments totalling 120,000,000 gold rubles. Russia lost 34 per cent. of her population, 32 per cent. of her agricultural land, 85 per cent. of her beet-sugar land, 54 per cent. of her industrial undertakings, and 89 per cent. of her coal-mines. European

Russia was dismembered; she was cut off from the Black Sea and very nearly from the Baltic also.

Such was the result of negotiations originally undertaken on the basis of 'no annexations, no indemnities, and the principle of self-determination'. Such was the peace of which the *Nord-deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* could write: 'The significance of the treaty with Russia lies in the fact that the German Government has worked only for a peace of understanding and conciliation.'

### The Settlement with Rumania

Having thus disposed of prostrate Russia the Central Powers turned their attention to her smaller ally to the south-west. The Russian collapse in 1917 had removed all hope of continued resistance by the Rumanian army, whose defences could now be very easily turned. The Government at Jassy and the High Command, therefore, entered into negotiations with Field Marshal von Mackensen which resulted in the conclusion of the armistice of Focani on 9 December 1917.

Kühlmann, Czernin, and Talaat Pasha had not returned to Brest-Litovsk after the rupture of negotiations by Trotsky on 10 February. After visiting their respective capitals they foregathered towards the end of the month with their Bulgarian colleague and the Rumanian representatives at Prince Stirbey's Castle of Buftea, and the preliminary negotiations began.

For Rumania peace at the hands of the Central Powers was only less painful than complete con-

quest. The alternative to the acceptance of a dictated treaty was obliteration from the map—complete partitionment between the States of the Quadruple Alliance. Austria-Hungary and Germany entertained a bitter hatred for this State which had abandoned her treaty of alliance with them,<sup>1</sup> and added to this was a scathing contempt for a defeated enemy, whilst Bulgaria nursed a long-cherished revenge for her own defeat at the hands of Rumania in 1913.<sup>2</sup>

The German Emperor and the German High Command favoured the deposition of the 'traitor' Hohenzollerns from the Rumanian throne, and the substitution of some loyal German Prince, but this was opposed both by Mackensen and Czernin on the grounds that it would constitute too great a blow to the monarchical principle. King Ferdinand was, however, forced to meet Czernin in Bucharest at the end of February and to hear such direct and outspoken reproaches as can seldom fall to the lot of any sovereign.

### **The Treaty of Buftea**

The preliminaries of peace were signed at Buftea on 5 March 1918, and were in keeping with the tenor of negotiation set at Brest-Litovsk. Rumania

<sup>1</sup> The Treaty of Alliance between Austria-Hungary and Rumania, to which Germany acceded by special protocol, was signed on 30 October 1883. It had been renewed at regular intervals by King Charles of Rumania, most recently in 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Under the Treaty of Bucharest (10 August 1913), which concluded the Third Balkan War, Rumania had acquired, at the expense of Bulgaria, a strong strategic frontier in the Dobrudja.

was as incapable of resistance as Russia had been, and the terms were in accordance with her condition and with the bitterness of the hatred of the Central Powers.

The whole of the Dobrudja was ceded to the Quadruple Alliance for subsequent partition among themselves. Hungary received substantial territorial concessions along the whole length of the Carpathian border, which placed her in a dominant strategic position *vis-à-vis* Rumania. The Rumanian army was to be reduced to a bare skeleton, all enemy territory occupied by it was to be evacuated, and the transportation of Austro-Hungarian and German troops was to be facilitated through Moldavia and Bessarabia in their advance on the Ukraine. All officers of the Entente military missions were to be dismissed. In addition, Rumania accepted 'in principle' all economic measures considered 'adequate to the occasion'.

But the Treaty of Buftea was only a preliminary, and there followed eight weeks of subsequent negotiations during which the Rumanian Prime Minister, Marghiloman, tried desperately to obtain some mitigation of the terms. All in vain: when the Peace of Bucharest was finally signed on 7 May it was found to be even more Draconian than its predecessor.

### **The Peace of Bucharest**

The Central Powers condemned Rumania to economic servitude and reduced her sovereignty to a farce. The whole line of the Carpathians went

to Hungary. The Dobrudja was divided between Bulgaria in the south and an Austro-German condominium in the north. Rumania was cut off from the sea, being merely conceded the use of Constanza as a free port. The Austrians took as a pledge the port of Turnu-Severin, and the Germans that of Giurgiu. Completely disregarding the international conventions regarding the freedom of transit and navigation on the Danube, the Central Powers and Rumania agreed that the river below Braila should be placed under a new commission consisting of only those States bordering on the Danube or on the European coast of the Black Sea, which in effect meant that the control of the whole river passed into the hands of the Teutonic Powers. Finally, the Rumanians were compelled to agree to work for years to feed Germany and her allies at fixed prices, and her oil-wells were leased to Germany for a term of ninety-nine years. An army of occupation was to be maintained in the country in order to enforce the terms of the treaty, and evacuation was only to take place 'at times later to be agreed upon'. One sole concession was made to Rumania. She was to receive a free hand in securing from Russia the province of Bessarabia.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Peace of Bucharest was finally ratified by both Germany and Rumania in July 1918. When, however, it became known that the abrogation of both it and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk would be a prerequisite demand by the Allies in granting a cessation of hostilities, the Rumanian Government again declared war on Germany a few hours before the signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918. Rumania was thus able to come to the Peace Conference as one of the Allied and Associated Powers.

The all-embracing scope of the Peace of Bucharest is indicative of the powerful influence exercised by German industrialists and military leaders at that moment, and the voluminous treaties which constitute the whole agreement are, perhaps more even than those signed at Brest-Litovsk—since the Peace of Bucharest provided indirectly for enormous war indemnities—the most convincing evidence of what a victorious Germany would have been. Its negotiators, and particularly Baron Burian, successor to Czernin, professed to regard it as 'moderate and just' (*mässig und gerecht*), and the *Münchener Post* described it as 'a model of the peace to be imposed on all our enemies'. But its true interpretation was given by a German staff officer in reply to the protests of a Rumanian diplomatist. 'A *harsh* peace', he said. 'You call it a *harsh* peace? Just wait till you see what we are preparing for France and England.'<sup>1</sup>

### The Results and Significance of Brest-Litovsk

The Peace of Brest-Litovsk was a milestone in modern history. For Russia and for Germany it obviously had results of incalculable importance; but for the Allied and Associated Powers its significance also was very great. The course of world history was changed on 3 March 1918.

For the Bolsheviks, peace on the Eastern Front, even such a peace as that exacted by Germany,

<sup>1</sup> See R. W. Seton-Watson, *History of the Rumanians* (Cambridge, 1934), p. 518; A. Marghiloman, *Note Politice 1897-1924* (Bucharest, 1927), iii, p. 340.



spelled salvation. By a gigantic sacrifice Lenin had purchased a 'breathing spell' during which he might discipline his own followers, eliminate the remainder of the revolutionary-bourgeois parties, and organize the defence of the Soviet Power against the attack of the Whites. With the shattering of their early hopes of a widespread revolt by the European proletariat, the Bolsheviks began concentrating their energies on the consolidation of the revolution in Russia. They could do this effectively only after hostilities had ceased to engage their attention. Lenin's stern adherence to the policy of national immolation caused wide dissent among his followers, but it gained that modicum of time necessary for the organization of the Red Army on the ruins of the Tsarist military machine. At the time his sacrifices to some appeared quixotic and unduly pusillanimous, but their wisdom was displayed when the victory of Kazan over the counter-revolutionaries bore witness to the growth of the new Soviet military formations. Without the 'breathing spell' the Bolsheviks might—probably would—have perished at the hands of the advancing Germans, or of the White counter-revolutionary forces or by the intrigues of the Cadets and the Social-Revolutionaries of the Right and the Left. The world might then have never witnessed the vast experimentation of the victorious Soviet Power nor endured the attentions of the Third International. The potential 'ifs' of the question do not cease there; they extend in an unending and roseate vista into limbo, for if there

had been no Comintern, would not Fascism and National-Socialism have been deprived of their primary *raison d'être*? And, though the particular brand of extreme disgruntled nationalism which they represent might well have found some other outlet, it probably would not have manifested itself in the form of totalitarianism.

Thus Ludendorff was the involuntary saviour of Bolshevism for Europe. By the same reasoning he was the godfather of that National-Socialist movement which later he espoused; for if Adolf Hitler is the putative child of the Treaty of Versailles, he also is the offspring of the Peace of Brest-Litovsk.

### German Hopes

For Germany both the issues and the results were more complicated than for Russia. Yet, in the case of Germany, the importance of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest was very great. At the outset it appeared as if the Supreme Command was on the eve of the realization of its wildest dreams. The psychological effect on the jaded civilian population close to starvation was to refresh its war enthusiasm and to rekindle the *Siegeswille* (will to victory) which had burned low in the dark days of 1917. And, indeed, the material achievements of the Supreme Command were very alluring. Within their grasp were the occupied provinces of the Baltic, ready to be erected into semi-independent States subject to German domination. Before them stretched the fertile lands of the Ukraine, whence grain and meat would be forth-

coming for hungry populations and horses for hard-pressed armies. The puppet government of the *Rada* was completely dependent upon German bayonets for its existence and could be—and ultimately was—overthrown by the pressing of a button to make way for an even more subservient successor. In addition, the treaties made by the Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest gave them access to the oil-wells of Azerbaijan and Rumania.

The bulk of the fighting having been done by Germany, the lion's share of the spoils fell to her. Already she was the dominant party in the Quadruple Alliance; now her position was vastly strengthened, for she held nominal sway over the Ukraine and Rumania, while her influence extended through the Trans-Caucasus and to the farther boundaries of the Don Basin. The way lay open for an intensification of the anti-British activities then being carried on in Persia and Afghanistan and for the institution of subversive propaganda in British India. But the ambitions of the Supreme Command vaulted still higher. They embraced not only a string of satellite States along the Russian border, but a Russia surrounded by German dependencies and which in time would itself become, for all practical purposes, a German colony.

### German Disappointments

But neither the possible nor the impossible ideas of the Supreme Command were destined to be fulfilled. The deliveries of food and grain from

the Ukraine fell far short of the promised million tons, and of these the greater part went to Austria-Hungary. The same was true of the expected oil and grain to be procured from Rumania. Attempts to obtain foodstuffs by force and against the will of the population failed utterly. Brest-Litovsk proved a will-o'-the-wisp, luring the Supreme Command ever farther and farther in pursuit. And the Supreme Command was an all-too-willing follower. The paranoia of Ludendorff had now become Napoleonic. The First Quartermaster-General saw himself, bathed in the sunlight of victory, creating and distributing kingdoms as had the Emperor of the French after the Peace of Tilsit. He kept a garrison in the Baltic States, where grand-ducal governments were in process of creation; an army of occupation was maintained in Rumania; an expeditionary force was dispatched to Finland to crush a Bolshevik rising; another expedition penetrated to Baku; a third occupied the Crimean ports, and the German colonies in the Crimea were urged to appeal to the Kaiser for annexation. Ludendorff's conception of *Deutschtum* ('Germandom') had become all-embracing. 'German prestige demands that we should hold a strong protective hand, not only over German citizens, but over all Germans,' he was writing at that moment (June 1918) to the Imperial Chancellor. In addition, the problems of the Polish Regency demanded constant care and supervision, and in the Ukraine the maintenance of a succession of unpopular régimes proved more of a liability than an asset.

A victor's peace must be enforced, and in enforcing the terms of the treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest the Supreme Command lost sight of the primary object with which it had begun the negotiations. It had sought to free its hands in the East in order to concentrate its reserves of man power in the West. Yet a million men immobilized in the East was the price of German aggrandizement, and half that number might well have turned the scale in the early stages of the German offensive in France. According to both French and British military authorities, only a few cavalry divisions were necessary in March and April 1918 to widen the gap in the Allied line so that a general retreat would have been inevitable. These were not available to the Supreme Command on the Western Front; but at the moment three German cavalry divisions were held virtually idle in the Ukraine. Only in the late summer of 1918, when the German losses had attained fantastic figures, were troops transferred from the East. But they came a few at a time and too late. Ludendorff the Politician had defeated Ludendorff the General.

Nor was this all. The seed sown at Brest-Litovsk brought forth not only Dead Sea Apples but also poisoned fruits. Too late were the Germans to realize that they themselves were not immune to the virus which they had injected into the body politic in Russia. Through different channels the poison of Bolshevik propaganda flowed back into Germany. When Lenin had been sent across Europe in a 'sealed coach', it had not

been foreseen that a year later a Soviet Ambassador with full diplomatic privileges and immunities would be resident in Berlin, providing a rallying-point and source of monetary support for the revolutionary elements of extreme German Socialism. Though it is very greatly to be doubted that Lenin received any financial assistance from the German Government or Supreme Command on his return to Russia, it is an established fact that members of the *Spartacist* (Communist) Party and the Independent Socialist Party were provided with money from Joffe for revolutionary purposes, and when, in October Joffe was finally expelled for his activities, it was too late.

Apart from this official contact of the Soviet Government with the revolutionary elements in Berlin, there were thousands of unofficial emissaries who brought with them the seed of subversive propaganda. German prisoners of war had been subjected to the full force of Bolshevik wiles. They had seen the Russian army crumble away under its influence, and on their return to Germany they brought the new political plague. Added to these were the troops on the Eastern Front themselves, who, by the Armistice Agreement of Brest-Litovsk, had been permitted to fraternize with the Russians in no-man's-land and had received from them copies of the *Fackel* and other revolutionary material specially prepared for German consumption. Thus each division transferred from East to West brought infection with it. 'We reached the point', admitted Hoffman, 'where we did not dare to

transfer certain of our Eastern divisions to the West.'

Not only did the Peace of Brest-Litovsk save the Revolution in Russia, it also materially contributed to the outbreak of the Revolution in Germany; and such 'stabbing-in-the-back' as was done is attributable to the Supreme Command itself, for they had supplied the original daggers.

### Significance of Brest-Litovsk for the Allies

To the Allied and Associated Powers the Treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest were of almost as great significance as to the contracting parties. The disclosure of the naked and brutal policy of annexation as practised by a victorious militarism proved a salutary deterrent to the activities of well-meaning but misguided pacifists in the countries of the Entente. These, discouraged by the dark days of 1917, had been preaching a 'peace of understanding'. The attitude of the German Supreme Command towards Russia, Rumania, and the Ukraine showed clearly what might be expected in the way of 'understanding' from the adherents of the *Machtpolitik*, and the effect on the peoples of Great Britain, France, Italy, and their smaller Allies, was a stiffening of the ranks, a locking of shields, a determination to fight on to the end and to destroy the militarist power in Germany. It was this renewed spirit of resistance which enabled the civilian population to remain calm in the face of the early disasters which followed the launching of the great German offensive on 21 March 1918, and to retain their confidence throughout that fearful spring and

early summer until the Allied counter-offensive on 18 July wrested the initiative from the German armies for the last time.

In addition to this psychological effect, the Peace of Brest-Litovsk had other unforeseen repercussions in the Allied camp. It was responsible for the arrival of Japanese troops for the third time in history upon the mainland of Asia. Terrified by the prospect of German penetration into Asiatic Russia, the British and French Governments, in direct opposition to the views of their advisers in Moscow and despite very great reluctance on the part of the United States, countenanced the dispatch to Siberia of an inter-Allied expeditionary force in which the Japanese contingent was much the largest numerically. Though the Allied and American troops were withdrawn soon after the conclusion of peace with Germany, the Japanese divisions were not evacuated until after the Washington Conference of 1922, and this period of occupation undoubtedly whetted the appetite of Nippon for further territorial acquisition in Asia.

### **The Effect in U.S.A.**

In the United States the effect of the Treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest was even more apparent. During the first year of American participation in the War there had seemed to the Allies a certain lukewarmness in President Wilson's pursuit of his policies. 'War upon German imperialism, peace with German liberalism'—that had been the essence of his speeches since April 1917. The emphasis had been laid on the profit which the



liberal elements in Germany could acquire by divorcing themselves from the domination of the Supreme Command and accepting the terms which the President would persuade the Allies to offer. It was largely in this spirit that Mr. Wilson had enunciated his Fourteen Points in January 1918. In formulating that programme he had hoped, on the one hand, to encourage the Russians to refrain from making a separate peace, and, on the other, to divide the German people from their rulers.

The unsatisfactory reply of the German Government to the Fourteen Points, followed by the barefaced brutality of the terms dictated at Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest and their ratification by the Reichstag almost without protest, convinced the President that there was but one Germany to be conquered, the Germany of the Supreme Command, and that the soundest political strategy was to reiterate again and again the impossibility of peace with the kind of government that had imposed the Treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest.

This change in policy, a change so vital that to it may be attributed in large measure the final and speedy victory of the Allied cause, was made public in President Wilson's speech at Baltimore on 16 April 1918, in which he frankly admitted his recent change of heart and new resoluteness of purpose:

‘. . . I am ready . . .’, he declared, ‘to discuss a fair and just and honest peace at any time that it is sincerely proposed—a peace in which the strong and the weak shall fare alike. But the answer, when I proposed such a peace, came from the German commanders in Russia,

and I cannot mistake the meaning of the answer. I accept the challenge. . . . Germany has once more said that force, and force alone, shall decide whether Justice and Peace shall reign in the affairs of men. . . . There is, therefore, but one response possible from us: Force, Force to the utmost, Force without stint or limit, the righteous and triumphant Force which shall make Right the law of the world, and cast every selfish dominion down in the dust.'

1874  
This amounted to no less than a pledge of the last man and gun and dollar in America to the Allied cause. Unanimity between the United States and the nations of the Entente had at last been achieved and victory was assured, for once the American man-power was made available, there could be no doubt of the outcome. The artificer of this compact was Ludendorff and the background of its forging was Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest. The German Supreme Command by its policy of aggrandizement had contributed to the Allied cause that final and essential degree of co-operation and oneness of purpose necessary for victory.

Indeed they did more, for they had for ever deprived themselves of the ability to use the Fourteen Points as a basis of negotiation. When the idea was suggested by Germany in the first Armistice Note of 4 October, it was met with a blank refusal on the part of the Allies ' . . . the pronouncements of President Wilson were a statement of attitude made before the Brest-Litovsk Treaty', ran an official British memorandum of that time. ' . . . They cannot, therefore, be understood as a full recitation

of the conditions of peace.' In the interpretation of the Fourteen Points which occurred during the pre-Armistice negotiations it was made clear that no vestige of Germany's conquests in the East could be retained by her. 'In any case the treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest must be cancelled as palpably fraudulent', stated the official commentary prepared by Colonel House's commission. 'Provision must be made for the withdrawal of all German troops in Russia.' And it was in accordance with this view that the treaties were abrogated in the Armistice Agreement of 11 November, and formally annulled by the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>1</sup>

### **Significance of the 'Forgotten Peace' To-day**

Such were the more immediate results of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest, and such was their tremendously important influence on contemporary events. But their repercussions upon the problems of to-day are even more important, for after a space of twenty years Germany and Russia have met again at Brest-Litovsk, but under vastly different circumstances.

In the interval much has happened of an incredible and contradictory character. Despite the hatreds engendered at Brest, it was but two years before

<sup>1</sup> See also Oxford Pamphlet No. 6, *The Fourteen Points and the Treaty of Versailles*, by G. M. Gathorne-Hardy. It was this attitude of the Allied and Associated Powers towards the dictated Peace of Brest-Litovsk which strongly influenced the German Social Democrats in finally accepting the dictated Peace of Versailles. They were persuaded that reaction against the harshness of the peace terms would inevitably occur in the Allied countries and that this would result in a revision of the Treaty.

Germany and Russia were once more on comparatively amicable terms owing to the circumstances of virtual outlawry in which Germany found herself after the Treaty of Versailles.

As early as 1920 the Weimar Republic, under the influence of General Hans von Seeckt, the creator of the *Reichswehr*, sought to reach a *rapprochement* with the Soviet Union, and finally succeeded in doing so by the Treaty of Rapallo and the Military Agreement of 3 April 1922, by which the German General Staff was enabled to send each year to Russia a certain number of officers to act as instructors for the Red Army, and a further number to gain all possible experience in the handling of heavy artillery, tanks, armoured cars, and other weapons forbidden to Germany under the Treaty of Versailles. Relations were further improved four years later by the signature of the German-Russian Non-Aggression Treaty of 1926.

This strange *mariage de convenance* continued with considerable felicity for eleven years and only terminated in abrupt divorce with the advent of Adolf Hitler. But throughout this period the German General Staff was actuated by pure expediency. No accusation of pro-Bolshevism could be levelled against them; they treated with the Soviet Union on a purely technical basis, yet maintained a stern watch on any possible infiltration of Communist doctrines into the ranks of the army.

With the downfall of the Weimar Republic in January 1933, and the foundation of the Third Reich, a change in Soviet-German relations was

not unexpected, partly owing to the fact that a clandestine circumvention of the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles was no longer necessary and partly because of the very definite attitude of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party to Bolshevism and the Soviet Union. Basing his policy on his own declared thesis of *Mein Kampf* and the complementary doctrines of Alfred Rosenberg, the Führer proclaimed a deathless war against Communism and a return to the imperialistic designs of Ludendorff at Brest-Litovsk regarding a *Lebensraum* for Germany in the Baltic Lands and the Ukraine. 'We [the National Socialists] stop the perpetual German migration towards the South and West of Europe,' Hitler declared. 'When we talk of new lands in Europe we are bound to think first of Russia and her border states,' and he went on to speak of the 'boundless humanity' of Brest-Litovsk as compared with Versailles.

There followed the period of the Russian 'Return to Europe', in an effort to counterbalance the growing Nazi menace. The recognition of the Soviet Union by two members of the Little Entente (Rumania and Czechoslovakia) in 1934, the Soviet entry into the League of Nations later in the same year, and finally the Soviet treaties of alliance with France and Czechoslovakia in 1935 were gradations in the schemes of Barthou and Laval to build up a European system which should present a united front against the growing aggression of Nazi Germany. These moves found their counterpart in the formation of an anti-Comintern Pact whereby, first

Germany and Japan in November 1936, and later Italy, Spain, Manchukuo, and Hungary, combined to resist the insidious forces of the Communist International.

In these years (1933-8) hundreds in Germany were imprisoned and many executed on a charge of 'Communism', while in Russia an even greater number met their deaths on the accusation of 'Fascist' sympathies. At no point in German-Russian relations could there have been a more complete divergence of ideological doctrines, at no time could the chances of a political *rapprochement* have been less apparent.

Yet throughout these same years there were those in both countries who sought to bring about just such a *rapprochement*. One element in the German General Staff still hankered after the good old days of the Seeckt liaison, and in Russia it was found necessary to purge from the military machine Marshal Tukhachevsky and six of his more brilliant general officers, who sought to re-establish a closer relationship with their 'opposite numbers' in Germany, while during the mysterious Moscow treason trials of 1936-8, members of the Old Bolshevik Party pleaded guilty to charges which included the wish to buy peace with Germany and Japan at the price of the cession of the Ukraine to the first and the Maritime Province to the second.

### **Munich and the Change in Soviet Foreign Policy**

It was not, however, until after the Czech crisis of September 1938 that a material change occurred in

Soviet foreign policy. Up to that time the guiding hand of Litvinov had directed Russian influence in favour of collective security and united action. After the rebuff of Munich, when Russia was excluded from the discussions which partitioned a State with whom she was in technical alliance, Stalin withdrew to his tent and awaited the inevitable approach of war which would place him in the strategic position of being courted by both sides.

He had not long to wait. The annexation of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939 destroyed the last flickering hopes in London and Paris of reaching an agreement with Germany by the way of appeasement and laid bare the necessity of preparing on a grand scale for the approaching showdown. Great Britain and France endeavoured by their guarantees to Poland and other threatened States to build up a 'peace bloc' which should deter Nazi Germany from further aggression; and in their efforts to buttress this formation they sought Soviet co-operation.

Stalin's price was high. He demanded a free hand in the Baltic States, cloaked under the guise of a 'guarantee'. The States concerned recoiled from such a protective power and sought refuge in treaties of non-aggression with Germany and in pronouncements of neutrality. At the same time Poland and Rumania, for whom Russian assistance was sought, refused to countenance the passage of Red troops through their territory, knowing full well that the slogan of Joseph Stalin was akin to that of Surtees' celebrated Mr. Jorrocks: 'Where I

dines, I sleeps.' The negotiations for an Anglo-French-Soviet Pact reached an *impasse*, and Stalin turned an ear to other offers.

It is not yet possible to state at what point the decision to conclude a Nazi-Soviet entente was reached, but there is evidence to show that tentative advances of increasing warmth had been in process since the beginning of 1939. The early approaches were abortive, but after the annexation of Bohemia and Moravia, it would appear, the course of the negotiations began to run more smoothly. Litvinov, the Soviet apostle of collective security, 'resigned' in May, and the activities in the early summer of the disgruntled Czech leader, General Syrový, as entrepreneur between Moscow and Berlin, were followed by the sudden and secret visit to Moscow of Herr von Papen in July. Slowly but surely the realization of the incredible became a possibility.

### **'Ideologies' give way to Imperialist Interests**

For both parties a *rapprochement* involved the abandonment alike of fundamental principles and active policies. The basic doctrines of *Mein Kampf*, the dreams of a German exploitation of the Ukraine and the Baltic, the proud boastings of the Anti-Comintern Pact, even the foundations of the Rome-Berlin Axis, must find a common grave with the Russian protestations of collective security, the 'People's Front', and the anti-Fascist line of the Third International. The Pelion of perjury was piled upon the Ossa of betrayal. Before the winds of military expediency and the grumbling hunger of



territorial aggrandizement, the veil of ideology was torn away, revealing the naked community of totalitarian imperialist interests.

For Soviet Russia a European war could be only advantageous. Her perpetual nightmare of a united front of capitalism against Communism would be banished and the field would be freed for the fulfilment of the age-long desire of Russia, whether Tsarist or Bolshevik, for sea-ports free from winter restrictions. With England, Germany, and France fully occupied, the Baltic and the Balkans would become fields for Soviet expansion. Even the old ambition of the control of the Straits might be realized at last.

For Germany the principal urge was the same military necessity which actuated her policies at Brest-Litovsk in 1918—the essential need to avoid a war on two fronts, and to concentrate on the West all available forces at the earliest possible moment. With the growing realization in Berlin that Ribbentrop's oft-repeated boast, 'The British will not fight', was at last to be proved false, the need for an agreement with Russia became the more imperative, first, in the hope of frightening the Western Powers into accepting the results of a 'lightning war' in Poland as a *fait accompli*; secondly, in securing Germany's Eastern border in the event of a war in the West; thirdly, in obtaining an unhampered source of supply.

The demands of the German Supreme Command for a neutralization of the Soviet Union grew more pressing and the bargaining in Moscow became

more hectic. The warning which Hitler had himself given in *Mein Kampf* was thrown into the discard. 'A Russo-German coalition waging war against Western Europe, and probably against the whole world on that account, would be catastrophic,' he had written. And again: 'The fact of forming an alliance with Russia would be the signal for a new war. And the result of that would be the end of Germany.' Yet in June it was known in Berlin that the Nazis had made an offer to the Soviets for the partition of Poland and the possession of the Baltic States. By 16 August the German Secretary of State, Baron von Weizsaecker, was able to inform the British Ambassador that 'the U.S.S.R. would even, in the end, join in sharing the Polish spoils'. A week later the apparently impossible had been achieved. The results were dire. Poland was invaded by Germany on 1 September, and by Soviet Russia on 17 September.

### **Brest-Litovsk 1918—Brest-Litovsk 1939**

And so they met again at Brest-Litovsk. But how different was the scene of 18 September 1939 from that of 3 March 1918—how great the contrast!

Then it was Germany, autocratic and stern, who called the tune for victorious ally and defeated enemy alike. Now a new Germany, desperately anxious for Russian aid, faced a rejuvenated Soviet State, a Russia enigmatic and powerful, whose favours must be paid for on her own terms. In 1918 the Soviet delegates wept before the demands of Hoffmann that they should surrender Poland and

the Baltic States. In 1939 Hitler had already conceded to Stalin as a sphere of influence those very Baltic States which Hoffmann and Kühlmann had annexed in order to protect them from Bolshevism, and was prepared to acquiesce in the return of Polish territory to Russia. The first agreement of Brest-Litovsk opened the door for Germany to the rich lands of the Ukraine and the grain and oil of Rumania; the second shattered the Führer's dream of a Ukrainian dominion and barred the way to an advance into Rumania save through Hungary. Germany in the interval had abandoned the monarchical principle, destroyed the republic, and sought uneasy refuge in dictatorship. In Russia the much despised régime of 1918, whose end had been so confidently predicted, remained mighty and sinister, though the source of its dictatorship had shifted from the proletariat to a single mysterious individual in the Kremlin. In sum, the passage of twenty-one years between the two meetings at Brest marked the transfer of ascendancy of power from Germany to Russia.

The speed and depth of the Soviet advance was a source of surprise and anxiety to the Germans. The first line of demarcation as announced on 19 September followed the ethnographic frontier, but this was followed three days later by a further concession by Berlin of a line much farther to the West, following the Vistula and running through the city of Warsaw. The definite frontier, as finally fixed by the Ribbentrop-Molotov Agreement of 29 September, allocated the former White Russian and

Ukrainian districts to Russia and to Germany the districts of Poland with a predominantly German and Polish population. This line is approximately that of the old 'Curzon Line' of 1919, which was intended by the Paris Conference as the definite frontier between Poland and Russia.

Thus the Soviet Union had extended its limits two hundred miles westward into Central Europe and had acquired a common frontier with Lithuania, East Prussia, Hungary, and Rumania proper (in distinction from Bessarabia). Red troops pushed rapidly forward, accompanied by the military organizations of the political police, and began to Sovietize the new districts.

It would be foolish to minimize the advantages accruing to Germany from her new agreement with Russia. It must be recognized that increasingly close economic collaboration is inevitable. Germany is seeking to obtain a hold on Russia by introducing German technicians and industrial advisers into Soviet industry. By this means it is hoped to increase the output of raw materials in order that ever increasing quantities may be available to Germany. Even if the role of Russia were confined to a purely benevolent neutral, Germany could be very well content. But the Soviet Union is prompted by no philanthropic impulse. Her supply of raw materials to Germany will continue, it may be assumed, just so long as Germany can pay for it either in gold, or in kind, or in political concessions, or as long as Russia wishes to prolong the war for her own ends. Despite the fulminations of Molotov

on 31 October, the ultimate advantage to Germany of her new liaison may be highly questionable. 'He must have a long spoon that shall dine with the devil'; moreover, the price of the meal is high. Hitler, in the role of Faustus, can never regain possession of his own soul, whereas Stalin, as Mephistopheles, can abandon his charge at will.

The second Nazi-Soviet agreement of 29 September contained provision for the parties to 'consult each other regarding the necessary measures' to be taken in the event of the failure of German peace overtures to Great Britain and France and the consequent prolonging of the war. At the cost, therefore, of a few skirmishes in eastern Poland, a banquet to Herr von Ribbentrop, and the promise of diplomatic consultation and trade promotion, Stalin has regained either possession or virtual control over practically all the territory lost at Brest-Litovsk in 1918. The price which Lenin paid for the *peredyshka* ('breathing spell') has been redeemed. The military control of the Baltic States is now Russia's, along with the naval domination of the Baltic. Combining new nationalism with old Bolshevism, the Soviet Union in its forward march is rooting out and destroying in the Baltic lands the marks of German civilization which have existed for many generations. Germanism is in retreat in Eastern Europe and what were once the proudest bastions of 'Teuton culture' against 'Slavic savagery' are hauling down their flags. Even the fortress of Memel, newly acquired by Germany from Lithuania, is being dismantled. Before the advance guard

of the Red Army, the German population of the Baltic lands, which composed the great majority of the upper and middle classes, is returning to the Fatherland, disillusioned, bewildered, yet obedient. National Socialism has surrendered to its Bolshevik ally the German heritage of a thousand years.

Such is the Soviet revenge at Brest-Litovsk in 1939 for Brest-Litovsk in 1918.

### **What has Germany gained ?**

The many historical parallels between the Brest-Litovsk agreements of 1918 and 1939 include one which is of very great, perhaps supreme, importance for Germany. In 1918 Ludendorff, carried away by the vistas of power and riches opened up by the treaties with Russia, the Ukraine, and Rumania, lost sight of the primary object of the peace, the freeing of Germany's hands in the East. In order to enforce a victors' peace and to exploit their new acquisitions to advantage, the Germans were compelled to retain on the Eastern Front a million men at a time when the addition of half that number to their armies in the West would have changed the course of history. Lured away by the will-o'-the-wisp of ambition, Germany found herself inextricably involved in a slough of dilemmas. She sank in them deeper and deeper.

The same is true in 1939. Without doubt Hitler imagined that his pact with Stalin ensured that hostilities would be restricted to the East. In this event he would have ample opportunity to watch and checkmate his new ally at the close of the Polish

campaign. But should Great Britain and France refuse to be terrorized by the bogey of Nazi-Soviet co-operation, Germany would in any case have her rear protected and her hands entirely free to fight in the West. Such was the reasoning behind the pact on the German side. But neither of the hoped-for premises have been realized. The war was not confined to the East. And in turning to the West, Hitler to-day must have a most uncomfortable feeling of insecurity in the rear. Apart from the army of occupation normally required for maintaining the Poles in a proper state of subjugation, Germany must keep continual watch and ward, in both military and political spheres, upon her ally. Nowhere in the East and South-east of Europe is German influence paramount, nowhere are German interests secure. The twin ghosts of Bolshevism and Pan Slavism beset the uneasy dreams of German diplomacy. Only the first existed in 1918. To-day the threat is dual.

The repercussions within Germany of the German-Soviet 'pact of mutual suspicion' and of the 1939 agreement of Brest-Litovsk can only be conjectured. But the confusion and bewildered panic of many can be conjectured. What can be the reactions of the Communist who has suffered persecution for seven years? Of the Party member who for an even longer period has imbibed the anti-Bolshevik doctrines of the Führer? Of the conservative elements who shut their eyes to many of the brutalities and defects of the Nazi system on the score that it at least provided a bulwark against

Communism? Above all, of the intelligent General Staff officer who recalls the effect of too close contact with Bolshevism in the past and wonders whether Germany is once more preparing for herself a 'stab-in-the-back'? In the answers to these questions may lie the germ of the future peace.

For the second time within a quarter of a century Germany has played with the fire of Bolshevism in pursuit of her desperate attempt to achieve world domination. Her first experiment ended in the Revolution of 1918. Her second may have even graver consequences, for it is but a short step from National Socialism to National Bolshevism. The only harvests Germany has garnered at Brest-Litovsk have been Dead Sea Apples and the Grapes of Wrath.